

ITEM 9-B

CITY OF ALAMEDA

Memorandum

To: Honorable President and
Members of the Planning Board

From: Andrew Thomas
Planning Services Manager

Date: February 13, 2012

Re: A Public Hearing to Take Public Comment on the Draft Environmental
Impact Report for the North Park Street Code and the Draft North Park
Street Code

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this public hearing is to provide the community with the opportunity to submit comments to the Planning Board on the North Park Street Code Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) and draft North Park Street Code ("draft Code"). The draft North Park Street Code and draft EIR are available upon request and are available on the City of Alameda website at www.cityofalamedaca.gov/City-Hall/Community-Development for public review. (The draft EIR and draft Code were transmitted to the Planning Board under separate cover in the first week of January. Additional copies are available upon request.)

The City of Alameda is requesting that the public submit their comments on the DEIR by **February 20, 2012**. Comments may be submitted in writing, by fax, or by electronic mail. The purpose of the February 13, 2013 public hearing is to provide the public with an opportunity to submit comments on the DEIR verbally. All comments received at the public hearing will be transcribed by the City and included with all other comments received by February 20, 2012 in the Final EIR.

Per the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), a Draft EIR is an informational document. It does not set policy, nor does it "approve" or "deny" a project; it provides information about the environmental consequences of a proposed project. The primary purposes of the public review of the Draft EIR are twofold: 1) to inform the public about the potential environmental consequences of the project, and 2) to provide the public with the opportunity to comment on the adequacy of the analysis. Public comments on the Draft EIR should focus on whether the document adequately analyzes the potential environmental impacts of the project. Upon receipt of the public comments, the City will review the comments and provide additional analysis as necessary to respond to public comments and to ensure a legally adequate document.

No formal action on the draft Code is required at this hearing by the Planning Board.

ANALYSIS:

In 2007 and 2008, the City of Alameda with assistance from Park Street Business Association (PSBA), the larger Alameda community, and a consultant team, led by The City Design Collective prepared the “Gateway District Strategic Plan”. The Strategic Plan established a redevelopment concept for the commercial “gateway” blocks along Park Street between the Estuary and Lincoln/Tilden. An extensive community outreach effort, community charrettes, open studios, and review and comment by a number of boards and commissions, including the Planning Board, informed the Gateway Plan. In 2008, the Planning Board and the City Council endorsed the Gateway Plan to guide future plans in the area.

In late 2008, the Planning and Building Department engaged The City Design Collective to prepare a new zoning ordinance for the area consistent with the concepts described in the Gateway Plan. At that time it was also decided to expand the area to include the blocks between Everett, the Estuary, and Tilden Way.

The North Park Street Code is a comprehensive zoning amendment for those areas shown in the map and bounded by the Oakland Alameda Estuary, Tilden/Lincoln, and Oak Street (approximately 20 blocks of commercial, residential and industrial land uses).



The following planning objectives and assumptions informed the preparation of the Code and the Draft EIR:

1. Guiding Document: The 2008 Gateway Plan is the guiding document for this effort. The draft Code is designed to create zoning regulations that will ensure that development is consistent with the community's vision as articulated in the 2008 Gateway Plan.
2. New Development Standards: With the departure of “auto row” from the area, significant change in the form of new development and new building construction will be necessary to achieve the goals of the Gateway Plan. Unlike the more established, historic area of Park Street from Tilden to San Jose, north Park Street does not include a large number of signature buildings or a consistent urban design

theme that can be relied upon to establish a design standard for new development. For these reasons, the North Park Street Code must effectively articulate design standards for North Park Street. The Code achieves this through a set of “form” based standards for new development in the area, which are intended to ensure that future development achieves the urban design objectives articulated in the Gateway Plan.

3. Successful Economic Development in a Weak Economy. The economic outlook for real estate investment for the foreseeable future is uncertain. Cities that hope to attract new, high quality commercial and/or commercial mixed-use developments will be in competition with other cities. North Park Street will be competing with locations on commercial boulevards in San Leandro, Berkeley, Oakland, El Cerrito, and other East Bay locations. Although Alameda has many locational advantages that other cities cannot match, in many instances the city that can make a decision on a project and get the project into construction in shortest amount of time with the least amount of development entitlement “risk”, will often be deemed the worthier investment. For these reasons, the North Park Street code must effectively describe the types of projects and building designs the City will approve without delay.

The DEIR is designed to support and facilitate the City’s ability to quickly review and make a decision on a project. The DEIR evaluates the environmental impacts of redevelopment of the North Park Street area consistent with the new Code. The DEIR includes a comprehensive program of mitigation measures that to be imposed on future projects in the area. For proposed projects that are consistent with the Draft Code, this approach will reduce or eliminate the additional cost, time delays, and uncertainty that is inherent in the environmental review process for new development.

4. Preserving a Neighborhood. The North Park Street plan area includes an Alameda residential neighborhood that surrounds the commercial core. This neighborhood includes traditional Alameda homes, former homes that have been converted to non-residential uses, and industrial uses that are on blocks with residential uses. The planning area also includes a large number of non-conforming residential uses on industrially zoned land. Although the close proximity of commercial uses, employment uses, and residential uses provides for a unique mixed-use neighborhood, the close proximity of these uses has also resulted in land use conflicts. The North Park Street code includes a comprehensive rezoning of the neighborhood area to reduce the number of residential properties that are currently “non-conforming” under the existing zoning and establish appropriate standards for new development to support a mixed use, pedestrian oriented, neighborhood, while avoiding unnecessary or unacceptable land use conflicts between incompatible uses.

Staff will be available at the meeting to answer questions about the scope and content of the Draft Code and Draft EIR.

RECOMMENDATION:

Hold a public hearing to accept public comments on the draft EIR. No action is being requested of the Planning Board at this time.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED BY:

Andrew Thomas
Planning Services Manager